

# Terminology, understanding AT and practice

Speaker: Abi James<sup>1</sup> and E.A. Draffan<sup>1</sup> *T4I communication type: Knowledge Transfer*  
Other authors: Peter Cudd<sup>2\*</sup> and Claire Bentley<sup>2</sup>

1 WAIS, University of Southampton; 2 CATCH, University of Sheffield; both UK

## 1. Overview

A workshop explored common challenges to assistive technology practice across a wide range of service providers and AT disciplines. The authors examine whether a lack of common terminology was hindering cross-sector cooperation.

## 2. Background

Assistive technologies cross many professional and technology domains. The authors have previously examined if there are commonalities to Assistive Technology (AT) adoption across health, social care and education domains [1]. Some similarities and differences were found. The cross-sectional view utilised in the study highlighted the scientific, academic and possibly commissioning conundrum of how policy and planning - especially if holistic - could be set in place when the AT, assumptions about what AT is, the forms of associated services and staff skills all vary.

There are reported issues at service user transitions between care teams and/or across the major domains (e.g. [2]), including the number of agencies involved in assessment and supply of AT; use of different language / terminology and different practice of operation. The authors hypothesised that cooperation between sectors was hindered by a lack of common terminology that would be needed to foster knowledge transfer and collaboration.

## 3. Methods

The authors hosted a workshop in which 20 stakeholders from different AT domains to attempt to understand the reasons silo working and if a common professional language and terminology would improve cross-domain cooperation. Participants were invited to the workshop from regional and national networks. Attendees were selected in order to represent as wide a range of roles as possible. While some were known to have expertise in AT, others had little practical experience. However, each attendee had a job role that required them to at least sign post to appropriate AT products and services. The delegates were placed into 4 interdisciplinary groups with between 4 and 6 members. Group allocation was based on employer and job title.

Throughout the workshop, participants' feedback was captured and important discussion points noted. This data was analysed for common themes and gaps between AT domains in order to guide where future work across AT domains may improve AT practice and outcomes.

### 3.1 Ethical statement

Ethical approval was unnecessary because it was a workshop rather than research.

## 4. Results

Analysis of the participant's roles shows that most overlap occurred for the age of the users accessing their services and type of AT had the least overlap. While this may reflect the diverse range of products and services classed as AT; attendees also acknowledged their limits in awareness of technology in other sectors. In some cases, participants disagreed on what they considered AT.

The majority of workshop participants worked with adults or with children. Only 2 participants worked with all age groups, including those in preschool settings. During the activity to explore AT needs across life, participants noted that transition between life phases were a risk point for transitioning between funding and support regimes. The definition of AT and therefore support and funding was not always consistent between phases. Some of the participants that worked in organisations that support school aged children transitioning into adult support noted that even here issues arose due to differences in legislation and policy or due to internal issues related to communication between groups of professionals.

In the latter part of the workshop, participants were introduced to the common barriers to AT adoption, namely:

- Stigma;
- Awareness;
- Competence & Confidence;
- Design;
- Functionality & technical support;
- Terminology;
- Cost;
- Evidence.

There was broad agreement with these themes except for "terminology" where

participants deemed it more important to focus on what the technology can do than how to describe it.

## 5. Discussion

While participants did not recognise the barrier that a lack of terminology caused, throughout the workshop participants experienced difficulties in understanding the technical application and user environment of colleagues working in other domains. Moreover, this was at juxtaposition with their discussion about the themes which highlighted the need to compare and contrast information on technologies used in and between sectors. For example, participants felt that their professional practice would utilise AT more if:

- Information was shared about the reliability and application of new technologies in and between sectors.
- There was engagement of users and professionals in the design and potential benefits of AT.
- Clearer information on the cost/benefits of using AT to enable to live, work and learn independently, to improve sector knowledge was shared at a professional and strategic level.
- Clear career paths and training route are available to develop, recognise and retain AT expertise within organisations and to allow cross sector transfers.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the diversity of terminology, language and practice is currently not conducive to a shared understanding and achieving a truly holistic, user friendly, life supporting framework. This implies that policy too will likely remain fragmentary rather than reducing barriers to shared learning between different AT domains.

## 7. References

1. 1. Draffan EA, James A, Cudd P, Bentley C.2015. Barriers and Facilitators to Uptake of Assistive Technologies: Summary of a Literature Exploration. *Assistive Technology: Building Bridges* 217 (2015): 350
2. 2. AKTIVE Consortium. The Role of telecare in meeting the care needs of older people: themes, debates and perspectives in the literature on ageing and technology. Published 2013. As accessed Nov 2016 : [http://www.aktive.org.uk/downloads/AKTIVE\\_Report\\_Vol\\_1\\_16.05.pdf](http://www.aktive.org.uk/downloads/AKTIVE_Report_Vol_1_16.05.pdf)

### Acknowledgement(s):

We would like to thank all those who took part in the workshop.

### Keywords:

Terminology, meaning, share, practice, policy, professional.

\* p.cudd@sheffield.ac.uk